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## ABSTRACT

This fastback examines kindergarten education for three- to six-year-olds in the People's Republic of China. Preschool education, which includes nurseries as well as kindergartens, sets the pattern for all schooling in China but is not an ideal system. Serious flaws have emerged that, unless addressed, will weaken education in China in the future. Such developments in the education system of the world's most populous nation merit the attention of United States and other western nations if the nature of the educative process and its effects on society, economy, and the interconnectedness of the peoples of the world are to be understood. A general overview of Chinese education is given. Succeeding sections delve into various aspects of early childhood education including the curriculum and teacher education. The booklet concludes with a discussion of the social consequences related to Chinese education and implications of the social consequences specifically for preschool education. Contains 16 references. (BT)

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FASTBACK

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*D. R. Walling*

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# Chinese Kindergarten Education: What We Can Learn

Rhea A. Ashmore

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**Rhea A. Ashmore**

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Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

# **Chinese Kindergarten Education: What We Can Learn**

by  
Rhea A. Ashmore

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## Introduction

One of my Chinese university students conveyed the essence of Chinese family life when he wrote that in China the family is very important, and family life "always directly influences one's mood, work, and even the whole life." In a family, the most important members are the children. Especially in recent years, as a result of China's birth control policy, many families are limiting themselves to only one child. Therefore, it is easy for that child to become the "emperor" or "empress" in the family if they are indulged by their parents.

All parents hope their children will have a bright future. The moment a baby is born, the parents begin to prepare for that future life. Beyond giving their children healthy foods and toys, most parents send their young children to nursery school every day, beginning at the age of three.

The academic achievement of their children is regarded as very important by most parents. Many parents pin their lifelong hopes and dreams on their children. If their children win prizes at school, earn permission to enter a famous university, or have some special ability, their parents are doubly proud. As the child grows, the parents make sacrifices that will help to ensure the child's

academic success. For example, in the evening, in order to make a good environment for the children to do homework, many parents will give up watching TV or doing activities that make distracting noises. On weekends many parents accompany their children to certain classes, and some parents even hire a "family teacher" to help their children with lessons.

One of my Chinese undergraduate students told me, "There has never appeared a stage in Chinese history like it is now that families are so child-centered." Perhaps couples who experienced the harsh years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) are unwilling to let their children experience the same, or the burgeoning socialist market economy affords more luxuries and so moves parents to seek more and better education for their children. Or the single-child policy has emphasized the child and so focused the attention of China's parents more sharply than ever before. Whatever the reasons, children are the center of attention. And this attention affects the children's education.

This fastback examines kindergarten education — schooling for three- to six-year-olds — in the People's Republic of China. Preschool education, which includes nurseries as well as kindergartens, sets the pattern for all schooling in China; but it is not an ideal system. Indeed, serious flaws have emerged that, unless addressed, will weaken education in China in the future. Such developments in the education system of the world's most populous nation merit the attention of American and other Western educators if we are to understand the nature of the educative process and its effects on soci-

ety, economy, and the interconnectedness of the peoples of the world.

Following, first, is a general overview of Chinese education. Succeeding sections then delve into various aspects of early childhood education, including the curriculum and teacher education. I conclude with a discussion of the social consequences related to Chinese education and their implications specifically for preschool education.

# An Overview of China's Education System

The People's Republic of China (PRC) boasts the world's largest education system. In 1994 the so-called Sleeping Giant reported 174,657 preschools with an enrollment of 26,302,725 children; 683,000 primary schools with 128,200,000 pupils; 82,000 regular middle schools with 49,817,000 students; 1,080 universities and colleges with 2,799,000 students; 1,172 schools of higher learning for adults with 2,352,000 students; and 18,700 secondary vocational schools of various grades and types with 9,125,000 students (Information Office of the State Council 1995).

This system is run by the State Education Commission (SEDC), which regulates education affairs nationwide. The SEDC formulates major education policies, designs overall strategies for promoting the cause of education, coordinates educational undertakings supervised by various ministries, and oversees work related to education reform. In short, the SEDC "is responsible for

turning out personnel well-educated and well-trained in various subjects and fields — with high standards of moral integrity, intellectual, physical and aesthetical developments — for the cause of socialist construction" (SEDC 1989, p. 36).

The education system comprises six levels: preschool (early childhood), primary, secondary, higher education, special education, and adult education. Preschool education (*youer jiaoyu*) includes nursery schools and kindergartens. Primary education (*chudeng jiaoyu*) comprises five-year and six-year programs of elementary instruction. Secondary education (*zhongdeng jiaoyu*) consists of general secondary schools, which include three-year junior secondary schools and three-year senior secondary schools, junior middle schools that are part of nine-year compulsory education, specialized secondary schools where preschool teacher training schools are placed, vocational schools, skilled worker schools, and correctional work-study schools. Higher education (*gaodeng jiaoyu*) involves institutions of higher education, research organizations, and regular higher education institutions (comprehensive universities, natural sciences and technology, agriculture, forestry, medicine and pharmacy, teacher training, language and literature, finance and economics, political science and law, physical culture, and art).

Special education (*teshu jiaoyu*) instructs deaf, mute, and blind students and is offered in separate schools at the primary level for six years and at the secondary level for three years. Most children who are physically or mentally challenged are schooled at home. Finally, adult

education (*chengren jiaoyu*) offers a wide range of education, including adult higher education institutions (radio/TV universities, workers' colleges, peasants' colleges, institutes for administration, education colleges, independent correspondence colleges, evening schools, and short-cycle courses for cadres), adult specialized secondary schools (radio/TV, staff and workers' schools, cadres' schools, peasants' schools, correspondence schools, and inservice teacher training schools), adult general secondary schools (staff and workers' schools and peasants' schools), adult primary schools (worker schools, peasant schools, primary classes, and literacy classes), and adult technical training schools. Except for the accredited four-year universities, which are subsidized by the SEDC, the remainder of the system as listed above is budgeted and managed by local-level government.

Education in China is, by American standards, highly regulated and centralized and highly ideological. On 12 April 1986, the "Law on Compulsory Education of the People's Republic of China" was approved by the Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth People's Congress. This national goal calls for raising the education level of China's population by providing all children at least nine years of formal schooling, including six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education. Dong stated that compulsory education serves two tasks: "One is to enable the students to be ready for the employment and the other is to enable them to lay a solid foundation for entering schools of higher level" (1988, p. 5).

Population control, which became a national imperative in the 1980s, has resulted in the single-child family becoming nearly the norm. The slogan "wan, xi, shao" (later, longer, fewer), which means marry late, have longer intervals between children, and have fewer children, now translates to a one-child family policy with exceptions made for minority groups and some culturally traditional agricultural regions of the country. In the cities a system of economic sanctions and watchful workplace and neighborhood birth control monitoring has been successful. In 1985 more than 90% of the children entering preschool in Nanjing and Beijing were from single-child families (Tao and Chiu 1985).

However, the Chinese saying, "Wang zi cheng long; wang nu cheng feng," reflects the indulgence of children. The English translation is, "All parents want their sons to become dragons and their daughters peonies." Concerns and realities about youngsters characterized as self-indulgent, overly dependent, and irresponsible have resulted: "[A] whole generation of spoiled children could threaten China's modernization movement, reverse the gains of the past thirty years, and undermine the values of a society based on the principles of collectivity, selflessness, and comradeship" (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, p.86). Thus education — particularly early childhood education — gives the only child an opportunity to interact with other children and with teachers trained to correct the errors of parents who cater too indulgently to their "little emperors."

As children progress through school, a rigid and comprehensive examination system determines whether an

individual will be eligible for more advanced training, and the form of that training further affects regard for the child's education. Beginning in kindergarten, children advance to either key, prestigious elementary schools or to regular primary schools based on their examination scores. Later, in the fifth or sixth year of primary school, test scores determine junior secondary school placements. At the end of the third year of junior secondary school, students take examinations to determine placements in either key senior or regular senior secondary schools, specialized secondary schools, or senior vocational schools. Students who score poorly are placed in junior vocational schools and graduate as "workers."

During the third year of senior secondary school and administered every July, students take the three- to four-day national examination to determine higher education placement. This comprehensive examination covers nine subjects: Chinese, history, philosophy, geography, politics, foreign language, mathematics, physics, and chemistry. For those earning distinguished scores, admission to the prestigious, key universities is granted. Those whose score is over the admission cut-off may attend regular or adult institutions of higher education. The remainder may either retake the examination the next year or join the labor force. The respective years of training vary according to the nature of the institution and its required courses. Brauchli found that:

Only 40% of primary school graduates pass tests that let them into junior high school; two-thirds finish. About one in eight Chinese reaches a general high

school. Only three to four of every 100 Chinese pass the rigorous entrance exams for university. In the U.S. by contrast, nine out of 10 students do some secondary school, and three out of four go on to some kind of tertiary education. (1994, p. 1)

Education politics, coupled with the ideals of socialism and traditional values, further underscores education. In China the social, the collective, and the group are valued over the personal, the familial, and the individual (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989). The promotion of selflessness and collectivism is the mission of preschool education. In addition, as several researchers have noted (Huang 1976; Stevenson 1992; Stevenson et al. 1990), Chinese children are taught from an early age that good behavior, studying diligently, and a high level of educational achievement are important forms of self-cultivation. Achievement is attained through effort, and improvement is within one's control. Thus, in order for their single children to be competitive in their collective society, parents strive to provide the best education opportunities possible. "Sherry," one of my Chinese undergraduate students who attended Shanghai International Studies University in 1994, wrote the following in her journal:

With the development of economy in China, more and more parents begin to pay attention to their children's education. The young babies are supposed to go to school at the age of 6 to 7. Before that, some parents have already taught their children maths, English.

Hoping that their children will be well-educated and live a comfortable life later, most parents use "pressure"

to force their baby to learn. Apart from a whole day's study at school, they'll ask their children to finish homework and to do exercises in the reference books so that they will get familiar with all types of questions and will get high score in the exams. The poor students, though in the years of playing and dreaming, have to do what their parents ask them to do. Every morning, they have to get up early to read English aloud, as it is said that it's good to read in the morning. After about an hour's reading and reciting, they'll be sent to school (mostly by grandparents) to begin a day's study. Since every teacher wants his students to be the top ones, he'll always teach a lot in class and assign a lot of homework out of class. Thus the students have to listen carefully, take notes diligently, and finish all the assignments on time, or else they'll be punished.

Apart from book knowledge, some parents even want their children to learn something special: to play piano, to draw pictures. . . . Though some instruments are really expensive, they still spare their money to buy. Then they'll again oblige their children to learn in a night school. Most of them even accompany their children to school to learn together.

The flowery children feel so burdensome and so tired with so many commands, they can't afford it and fall ill. Some leave home to find a place where there is no pressure and no homework. Also there's a small part of children who commit suicide.

Facing so many problems among our young generation today, why don't we think it over? My suggestion is that don't be too strict with your children, ask them to do things according to their interests. If so, the result will be much better.

## Preschool Education

Preschool" is all education preceding first grade: nurseries and kindergartens. A clear distinction abides: Nurseries, where learning to help each other is the mission, admit children from two months to three years of age, operate under the authority of the Ministry of Public Health, and are staffed chiefly by nurses. Under the jurisdiction of the SEDC, kindergartens enroll children from three to six years old, prepare children academically and socially for primary school, and employ head teachers and childcare workers. According to the *Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 1994*, the number of kindergartens has increased steadily — from 19,226 in 1965 to 174,657 in 1994. Similarly, the number of enrolled students grew from 1,713,000 to 26,302,700. For purposes of this fastback, I will concentrate on the kindergartens.

Regarding kindergarten personnel during the same 1965-94 period, the number rose from 162,100 to 1,149,200, of which 68,427 were kindergarten heads, 861,756 were teachers, and 53,352 were health nurses. Of this total, the overwhelming majority, 1,081,133, were females.

The kindergarten curriculum, devised by the SEDC, blends childhood development with the values, ideas, and premises of the collective good. According to Strickland (1984), educators are informed that youngsters have a low ability to concentrate and focus on things of interest; memory development is dependent on concrete, sensory experiences; and imagination and creativity are linked to vocabulary. The curriculum also embraces collectivism, the sense of participation and commitment to an ideal greater than one's self; dedication; spirit; and optimism. "Children are considered citizens today as well as in the future, and this is a time of preparation for their role as full-fledged citizens when they are older students, teenagers, and adults" (Sidel 1982, p. 154).

In accordance with the Chinese constitution, education policy, and the physical and mental development of kindergarten children between the ages of three and six, the objectives of early childhood education are "to provide children with an overall education for their physical, intellectual, moral and aesthetical development, so as to ensure a healthy and vigorous physical and mental growth, and to lay a good foundation for the training of a new generation" (SEDC 1989, p. 130). The SEDC develops the preprimary syllabi and curricula; coordinates the review and publishing of textbooks; formulates basic requirements and specifications for school buildings, equipment, and instructional aids; and drafts guidelines for admissions to preschools. This supposedly ensures the uniform development of preschool education countrywide.

Monitored by the government, there are five major models of Chinese kindergartens:

1. *Kindergartens run by the SEDC.* The teachers and administrators of these kindergartens are appointed by the education authorities, and the funds are allocated from the government's education budget. This type of kindergarten is regarded as the model kindergarten. In 1994 the education department managed 20,645 such kindergartens.

2. *Kindergartens run by enterprises and public undertakings.* Here, the responsible enterprises and public ventures are accountable for the employment of teachers and administrators, as well as the allocation of funds for these kindergartens. An example of this is a joint-venture company that provides education for its workers' families. In 1994 there were 23,266 kindergartens of this type.

3. *Kindergartens run by urban neighborhood committees.* The major sources of funding for these kindergartens are overhead payments and tuition. The overhead payments (or actual locations) are provided by the parents' work units; the tuition is paid by the parents. Also, the local governments subsidize a portion of the required expenditures. The teachers and administrators are employed by the kindergartens. In 1994 urban neighborhood committees directed 112,462 kindergartens.

4. *Kindergartens run by rural communities.* Funds for these kindergartens are raised by the business cooperatives of rural townships and villages. The townships and villages employ the teachers and administrators. In 1994 kindergartens in this category numbered 103,073.

5. *Private kindergartens.* These kindergartens are supported mainly by the tuition fees paid by the parents.

The teachers and administrators are hired by the kindergarten owners. In 1994, 18,284 private kindergartens were in operation.

Although the SEDC determines general early childhood education policies and curricula, the actual structure of a school's curriculum and conditions of the schools vary widely. A relative uniformity characterizes urban kindergartens, but rural kindergartens differ widely from school to school and region to region. Resources, economics, regional language needs, and teacher expertise contribute to the variations. Some rural kindergarten classes enroll only six-year-olds; others educate children aged four through six. Many rural primary schools also include kindergarten-age pupils, which offers a practical way of providing preschool education without any additional funding, thus enabling young children to adapt to group life and study and preparing them for the primary school. In addition, many rural primary schools offer seasonal, rather than traditional, class schedules and calendars. Some kindergartens function as daycare centers; others board the children.

# The Kindergarten Curriculum

Kindergarten education is understood as unique, neither primary nor adult education parallels this developmental period. In October 1981 the Chinese Ministry of Education issued "The Curriculum for Kindergarten Education," the national blueprint for such education. According to this document, the major kindergarten programs are daily life and health habits, physical activities, ethics, language training, general knowledge, arithmetic, music, and art. Following are the detailed objectives, according to the SEDC (1989):

- *Daily Life and Health Habits:* To introduce children to simple, basic hygiene knowledge related to their daily lives. This aspect of instruction is designed to help children form good habits necessary for independent living.
- *Physical Activities:* To participate in physical activities in order to stimulate normal development, improve the ability to adapt to the surrounding environment, and foster a strong physique. Such activities augment

acquisition of basic movements and include quick reactions, coordination, and correct posture. Physical activities also train children to be alert, brave, disciplined, moral, lively, and cheerful.

- *Ethics*: To provide children with values and moral education, such as love for the motherland, the people, work, science, and protection of public properties. Ethics promotes morality and sound social behaviors, including a bright, cheerful spirit.
- *Language Training*: To train children to pronounce clearly, correctly, and articulately; to teach children to speak standard Chinese; to enrich their vocabulary; and to develop their ability in thinking and oral expression. This fosters children's primary interests in literary works.
- *General Knowledge*: To enrich children's basic knowledge and to broaden their vision of nature and society, stimulating their desire for learning in order to help them gradually form a "correct" attitude toward people and the social environment in which they live. Through learning general knowledge, children also are expected to develop their abilities in concentration, observation, memorization, imagination, thinking, and language expression.
- *Arithmetic*: To teach children to understand the notion of numbers and to do addition and subtraction from 1 to 10; to introduce basic knowledge about geometric figures, time, and space so as to cultivate children's interest in calculation; and to develop rudimentary ability in logical thinking and shaping children's cognition with accuracy, flexibility, and agility.

- *Music*: To teach children the fundamental knowledge and skills of singing and dancing; to develop an interest in music and dance, as well as to get a sense of rhythm; to mold temperament and character through developing children's feelings, memories, imaginations, and expressions of music.
- *Art*: To encourage children to express fully their feelings and perceptions of the surrounding world through drawing and handicrafts (clay molding, paper cutting and folding, toy making, etc.); to foster children's interests in art and teach them to appreciate the beauty of nature, social life, and works of art; to develop the children's ability in observation, imagination, and creativity in order to generate the coordination and flexibility of their hand movements; to master the basic skills in manipulating necessary tools and materials.

The programs and objectives of kindergarten education are accomplished through play, physical activities, observation, hands-on practice, recreation, and other daily routines. Play is considered the basic method for achieving curricular content, and four types are described in the curriculum guidelines: *creative play* (role play, organized play, and demonstration play), *intellectual play*, *music play*, and *play for entertainment*. Particular emphasis is placed on helping children foster a love for their homeland. This "moral education" cultivates a child's self-reliance, readiness to do labor, and consideration for others. The guidelines also stress that favorable local conditions and local resources be used as teaching aids.

Children are organized in kindergarten levels according to age. Children ages three and four are placed in the lower-level classes; those aged four to five are stationed in intermediate-level classes; and children ages five and six are placed in the advanced-level classes. Session (or lesson) lengths vary by level: 10 to 15 minutes at the lower level, 20 to 25 minutes at the intermediate, and 25 to 30 at the advanced level.

The schedule for children likewise varies by level. Theoretically, in the lower level six lessons are scheduled in the morning (1 language, 1 general knowledge, 2 music, and 2 art), and eight are offered in the afternoon (1 physical education, 1 language, 1 general knowledge, 1 arithmetic, 2 music, and 2 art). For the intermediate level, 10 lessons are scheduled in the morning (1 physical education, 2 language, 2 general knowledge, 1 arithmetic, 2 music, and 2 art), and 11 are arranged in the afternoon (1 physical education, 2 language, 2 general knowledge, 2 arithmetic, 2 music, and 2 art). For the advanced level, 12 lessons are held in the morning (1 physical education, 2 language, 2 general knowledge, 2 arithmetic, 2 music, and 3 art), and 12 lessons are held in the afternoon (same as morning).

Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) videotaped a day at Dong-feng (East Wind) Kindergarten, a preschool run by a city in southwest China for the children of municipal employees. They found the following schedule:

6:30 — Wake-up for boarders.

7:00 — Morning exercise for boarders.

7:45 — Breakfast for boarders and day students who arrive early.

- 8:15 — (Monday) Health check; (Tuesday through Thursday) Group exercise for day students.
- 8:30 — Morning greetings in classrooms.
- 8:45 — First classroom sessions (lessons) begin. For the upper grades (five- and six-year-olds) there are two, formal 40-minute instructional sessions each day. For the middle grades (four- and five-year-olds), there are two 25-minute instructional sessions. And for the lower grades (three-year-olds), there is one 15-minute instructional session each day. (Other time is devoted to various types of play.)
- 10:00 — Break (restroom).
- 10:30 — Outdoor games and play.
- 11:45 — Lunch.
- 12:15 — Nap.
- 3:00 — Snack.
- 3:30 — Group games, singing, and dancing.
- 4:15 — Play.
- 5:30 — Dinner.
- 6:00 — Day students go home.
- 6:30 — Boarders watch television or movies or play freely.
- 8:00 — Bedtime for boarders.

One of the kindergartens' central missions is to facilitate language arts learning — reading, writing, listening, and speaking. At this level the emphasis is on enunciation, diction, memorization, and self-confidence in speaking and performing. Children learn to recite stories

and inspirational moral tales; they sing and dance, both alone and in groups. According to the Chinese, if a child can memorize 300 poems from the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 960-1127), she or he is considered very clever. One of my Chinese graduate students testified that, indeed, many children between the ages of three and 10 can perform this feat.

In order to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the language arts curriculum, the following delineates the overall goals and various objectives by level (Strickland 1984):

Overall goals: To correct pronunciation, learn conversational vocabulary, thinking, gain oral expressive ability, and appreciate literature. Minority-language children should master their own language.

Specific objectives:

*Lower level*

1. Understand common language. Learn correct pronunciation of common language, especially sounds with which they have difficulty.
2. Vocabulary. Ability to use frequently used words, such as nouns, verbs, pronouns, and adjectives.
3. Learn to understand adults and peers and to converse with other people.
4. Be able to use simple sentences to talk about the main focus of a picture.
5. Enjoy hearing teacher tell stories and read aloud nursery rhymes. Gain initial understanding of story.
6. Memorize eight to 10 nursery rhymes.
7. Learn one or two stories.

### *Intermediate level*

1. Continue to learn common language, pay particular attention to the four tones.
2. Develop vocabulary and master more nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, and conjunctions and understand their meanings.
3. Pay attention to others when they talk, and answer questions.
4. Use complete sentences to talk about content of pictures and use new words in describing pictures.
5. Understand stories and poems and memorize main points. Recite eight to 10 poems. Retell three or four simple stories. Appreciate picture books and listening to radio programs developed for children.

### *Advanced level*

1. Speak common language in everyday life and pay attention to pronunciation.
2. Further develop vocabulary and be able to describe events using location words, comparative words, connectors (such as because), and synonyms.
3. Listen politely to other people, converse with others, and express themselves well.
4. Use connected discourse in telling stories from pictures and be able to self-correct some errors in one's speech.
5. Read aloud eight to 10 poems with expression. Retell three to four stories. Critique other people's storytelling. Develop appreciation of stories, pictures, and children's broadcasts and retell when appropriate.

## Training Kindergarten Teachers

Teachers in China are trained at different levels, according to the level at which they plan to teach. Teachers for nursery schools, kindergartens, and primary schools are prepared at the secondary level. Secondary school teachers and those who will teach in higher education are prepared at the higher education level.

At the secondary education level, specialized secondary schools or normal schools enroll junior secondary school graduates for three to four years of additional schooling. General normal schools train teachers for primary (elementary) schools and provide advanced courses for inservice training; early childhood normal schools provide training programs for nursery school and kindergarten teachers. The early childhood programs (both nursery school and kindergarten) of the teacher training schools normally enroll only female graduates of the junior secondary schools. (Teachers of older children and young adults may be either male or female.)

An academic year for the early childhood program lasts all 52 weeks, which are allocated as follows for the three-year program:

*First year:* 36 weeks of formal instruction; 4 weeks of lesson review, examinations, holidays, and open time; 2 weeks of productive labor; and 10 weeks of vacations (summer and winter).

*Second year:* 34 weeks of formal instruction; 4 weeks of lesson review, examinations, holidays, and open time; 2 weeks of student teaching; 2 weeks of productive labor; and 10 weeks of vacations.

*Third year:* 31 weeks of formal instruction; 5 weeks of lesson review, examinations, holidays, and open time; 6 weeks of student teaching; and 10 weeks of vacations.

The early childhood curriculum includes political science, Chinese language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, foreign language, child development, preschool education theory, child hygiene, teaching methodology of language, teaching methodology of everyday science, teaching methodology of calculation, physical education and its teaching methodology, art and its teaching methodology, dance methodology, and music methodology. Field observations, including student teaching, complete the scope and sequence of experiences.

Field observations are made through regular visits to actual schools and participation in their activities throughout the program. During the first year, students observe for one week in a kindergarten setting. In the second year, students observe for two weeks. Third-

year students spend a half-day each week as interns in kindergarten classrooms. One month prior to graduation, students spend their entire time in residence at a school site. To avoid relying merely on classroom teaching and neglecting such critical learning activities as playing, observing, and hands-on practice, student teaching also emphasizes the different phases of children's physical and mental development and psychological characteristics. Considering field observations and student teaching, a total of eight weeks of such "hands-on" work is required in the three-year program and 10 weeks in the four-year program.

The level of education of most preschool teachers in China is equivalent to that of a high school graduate in the United States, but with an added career component. As competency exams are required at various levels of education:

the fact that these students are enrolled here [in an early childhood normal school] rather than a secondary school for the preparation of elementary school teachers or a secondary school designated for the preparation of students for university work indicates that they probably did less well than many of their contemporaries on these tests. (Strickland 1984, p. 32)

In addition to exam requirements, faculty teams at many early childhood normal schools personally interview prospective candidates. Criteria assessed are enunciation, singing voice, drawing ability, and general appearance. If selected, students' tuition, room, and board are subsidized by the government.

## Teacher Training Text Outline

I include the following table of contents in order to illustrate the teaching concepts typically included in the early childhood curriculum. This 17-chapter table of contents is taken from the required teacher training textbook, *Pre-primary Education* (Yuan et al. 1991). Interesting to note is the emphasis on games and moral education.

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*Pre-primary Moral Education (Part 1)*

- Significance and Task of Moral Education
- Structure, Characteristics, and Forming Pattern in the Course  
of the Child's Moral Shapeness
- Principles of Moral Education
- Methods of Pre-primary Moral Education

*Chapter 7*

*Pre-primary Moral Education (Part 2)*

- Patriotism Education
- Collectivism Education
- Politeness (Courtesy) and Disciplinary Education
- Good Disposition Training

*Chapter 8*

*Pre-primary Art Education*

- Significance of Art Education
- Characteristics of Aesthetic Feeling Development and Tasks  
of Art Education
- Contents and Methods of Art Education

*Chapter 9*

*Pre-primary Games*

- Characteristics and Educational Function
- Role Games
- Structure Games
- Performance Games
- Intellectual Games
- Organization of Playing Games and Evaluation
- Toys

*Chapter 10*

*Lectures in Kindergarten*

- Lecture Features and Factors Influencing Studying
- Teaching Principles in Kindergarten Lecture
- Basic Methods in Kindergarten Lecture
- Organization and Leadership in Kindergarten Lecture

*Chapter 11*

*Pre-primary Labor Training (Education)*

- Characteristics and Function
- Contents and Requirements
- Organization of Labor Training

*Chapter 12*

*Daily-life, Holiday, and Recreational Activities*

- Daily-life Activities
- Holiday and Recreational Activities

*Chapter 13*

*Preparation for Primary School Enrollment*

- Significance and Needs of Preparation
- Preparation Program for Enrollment
- Pre-primary Class

*Chapter 14*

*Kindergarten and Family*

- Function, Position, and Condition
- Parents' and Teachers' Relationship in Kindergarten

*Chapter 15*

*Educational Plan and Record in Kindergarten*

- Significance and Requirements
- Types and Forms of Kindergarten Educational Plans
- Record Keeping

*Chapter 16*

*Pre-primary Teachers*

- Social Function and Responsibilities
- Working Characteristics
- Professional Accomplishment of a Pre-primary Teacher

*Chapter 17*

*Kindergarten Management*

- Significance and Requirements
- Management System and Staff Size
- Management Procedures and Contents

## **Classroom Management**

The Chinese believe that teachers should like children and be warm, but teachers should be more firm than tolerant. According to Tobin, Wu, and Davidson, "Chinese teachers work patiently (persistently, diligently) to correct children's behavior, but they do not tolerate misbehavior. Expecting preschool teachers to correct the excessive indulgence (the over-tolerance) of parents, Chinese do not especially value tolerance in teachers" (1989, p. 212).

Teachers are trained to govern children well. One method of governing is to continuously monitor and correct children's behavior and conduct. For example, rather than waiting for a minor infraction to escalate, a respectable Chinese preschool teacher intervenes assertively at the onset. Another method is to provide structure and order by planning lessons carefully and anticipating children's moods and needs. As children are not born knowing how to behave correctly, teachers bear the responsibility of teaching and modeling self-restraint and correct behavior.

## **Continuing Education for Teachers**

In order to ensure continued education, county teachers advancement schools generally provide inservice teacher education for nursery school, kindergarten, and primary school teachers. Depending on the teacher's level of competency, four categories of training are available. First, remedial assistance programs are designed for teachers who are not proficient or who have not yet

completed formal teacher training programs. This curriculum emphasizes mastery of teaching materials and methodology. Second, for those who are generally competent in teaching but who have not been certified, further study is offered at teachers advancement colleges or through radio-TV programs and correspondence courses. Third, for effective teachers and those who have the necessary educational preparation, opportunities are available to extend knowledge, study education theories, consolidate teaching experiences, and pursue further individual studies. Finally, teachers who are considered distinguished may augment their mastery of theory and pedagogy to become experts and models in their teaching fields through advanced studies. Delivery systems are flexible and include part-time study, self-study, and short-term training.

In general, weekly half-day inservice training also is provided for all teachers. Content ranges from moral education to instructional applications. In order to pursue full-time study in professional and undergraduate programs, teachers may apply for sabbatical leaves.

## Chinese Education and Social Consequences

Gloria," one of my students at Shanghai International University and then a senior majoring in English, provided the following description that captures well the ethos of the modern Chinese family with a young child.

People call the only child in the family "the little sun." Since he is "sun," he must be circled by many "stars." That is true. Each morning, father will wake up his "little sun" who refuses to open his eyes; mother will take his clothes, ready to dress him whenever he gets up; and grandpa and grandma will prepare a delicious breakfast for him. After some crying and struggling, the child finally gets out of bed and mother washes his face and teeth; father puts textbooks in his bag; grandmother takes the milk and eggs and bread in front of him and says, "You are a good child, so eat all these things quickly, or you'll be late for school!"

"No, I don't like eggs and bread!"

"Please, eat them all! You will be strong then. Do you want some more sugar in the milk? Do you want some chocolate on the bread?"

Grandma and grandpa try everything to make the child eat. And then father will go out for his bicycle. "Hurry up! Sit on the back of my bicycle! I'll take you to school!"

Then, the child, with his mouth full of food, with mother running after him asking him to take some apples to school, unwillingly staggers out of the house and begins another day.

That is actually the beginning of a new day for more and more parents today, as well as for many grandparents. They have to go to work, too. Yet every morning, they always contribute too many times to their "little sun." And the child, who needn't to do anything himself, becomes more and more lazy and dependent. He can't wash anything for himself, even a handkerchief. He can't clean up his bag and his bed. He can't dress by himself. He knows that his parents will help him with his homework, so he never pays attention to his study. He knows that grandparents will give him anything he wants to eat, so he is more picky about the food.

This kind of child is unhealthy, physically and spiritually. Because of less physical exercise and suitable labor, and especially overeating, he is often weak and fat. Because of too much indulgence of family, he thinks himself as the center in everywhere — home and school. So he doesn't know how to get along with other children, how to respect other people, even the parents and grandparents who do everything for him. He probably becomes selfish and arrogant. During his growth, every step is decided by his family, and he is more and more dependent. How can you expect him to do anything useful to the society? It is a problem. Because in the next decades, China will be full of the only-children. How to educate them correctly is an emergent problem.

Since 1949 China, the "civilized country of long history," has witnessed numerous political upheavals. Today's education system reflects these changes, spoiled children being only one of them. Additional social consequences that are challenging Chinese schools — including kindergartens — include gender and preschool teaching, the closing of preschools, and the changing social role of teachers.

Preschools in China reveal highly gendered worlds. Most preschool teachers and aides and a majority of preschool directors are women. The higher one looks in the preschool hierarchy, the more likely one is to find men: male teachers are exceedingly rare; male preschool directors and university professors of preschool education are slightly more common; government officials overseeing preschool education more often than not are male (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989, p. 214). Compared to teaching older students, preschool teaching equates to lower status and, consequently, pays less. As a result, preschool teaching is no longer a pursued profession. Fewer students enroll in schools of education, as more students seek degrees in accounting, business, computer science, and foreign languages, where jobs are available and pay will be higher than in teaching.

Although the 1986 compulsory education law calls for raising the education level of China's population by providing all children at least nine years of formal schooling, preschool education is not mandatory. Consequently, preschools (both nursery schools and kindergartens) are closing across the country, jeopardizing the foundation of the Chinese education system. Today only 8% of the

kindergartens and nurseries are run by the government. More than 90% are operated by social groups, individuals, institutions, and enterprises ("Preschools Get Call," 1994). Formerly state-run preschools are being transformed into more profitable ventures, such as hotels, workshops, warehouses, offices, and taxi companies.

The social role of teachers also is undergoing dramatic change. In old China, apart from the ruling class of emperor and those near him, the people were stratified into four classes. The top was the "Shi" class, composed of those who were educated with formal schooling, including teachers of all circles. Next was the "Nong" class, or farmers. Below the farmers was the "Gong" class, the skilled blue-collar workers. The lowest class was the "Shang" class, the merchants or businessmen (Liang 1963). The modern world has nearly reversed this hierarchy.

The Shi class, the educated class, played the traditional role of mediator, easing conflict between the government and the governed. Their role in implementing a checks and balances mechanism was visible, as they advised the government to control wisely by being generous to the four classes. Both society and the government recognized the Shi role of "educator," teaching how harmony could be achieved by the obedience of the governed and the humility of the governors.

Since 1949 the roles of educators have changed dramatically. From 1949 to 1966 the new regime of China, the Communist Party, remodeled, or "reformed," Chinese intellectuals. Before they were allowed to serve as educators, intellectuals were judged according to their class background and political ideological qualifica-

tions. In the 1950s the Communist Party of China (CPC) regarded all intellectuals with profound distrust and labeled them as fundamentally bourgeois and politically unreliable.

The nationwide persecution of educators peaked during the period from 1966 to 1976, the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. At that time politics was everything, and revolutionary fervor reached such proportions that universities and schools were closed so that teachers and students could participate in "destroying the four olds" — old culture, old ideology, old customs, and old habits. Teachers were forced to question how they had taught and why, what was wrong with their teaching, and what was wrong with themselves. Those who refused to admit their faults received inhumane treatment; corporal punishment was not unusual.

Since 1977 the CPC has adopted new policies to open China to the world. Economic reform has been the goal. Political leaders now are attempting to correct the historical mistakes of mistreating educators. The CPC has stated that the teaching profession should be regarded as one of the most admired jobs in the society; social and political status and salary should be raised; housing, working conditions, and living environments should be improved; and the morale of teachers should be enhanced (CPC 1985).

With this renewed and increasing public acknowledgment of teachers' contributions to society, one would assume that teachers now pursue normal lives. But the reality is limited improvement. As teaching is a non-

profit enterprise with humble salaries, few young people pursue the profession. Also, teachers in service and new graduates from teachers' colleges are leaving teaching in unprecedented numbers. A contradiction has resulted: People desire quality education for their "little suns" but do not support the profession that makes this goal reachable.

If the above trends continue, the People's Republic of China will suffer from a weakened education foundation and ineffectual citizens. The PRC will not nurture adequately educated young people for an increasingly market-driven society, and the problem will intensify because of decreasing numbers of teachers.

Perhaps the indulged children will mature as leaders. Perhaps China will adopt an affirmative action program so that the historically inherited discrimination against the under-represented class of teachers will be rectified. Perhaps China will appeal to her overseas Chinese to return and rebuild the education base. Perhaps teachers will regain their status as the Shi class. Perhaps. . . .

The plight of Chinese education is not unlike that faced by the United States, where teachers also are held in low regard. Fully functional education reform must attend not only to the formal aspects of teaching but also to the social ramifications for teachers. Mao Zedong addressed a group of young Chinese scholars studying in Moscow in 1957. His words merit consideration, both by the Chinese who once revered him and by Western educators and others concerned about education and the future:

The world is yours, as well as ours, but in the last analysis, it is yours. You young people, full of vigor and vitality, are in the bloom of life, like the sun at 8 or 9 in the morning. Our hope is placed on you. . . . The world belongs to you. China's future belongs to you.

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The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation was established on 13 October 1966 with the signing, by Dr. George H. Reavis, of the irrevocable trust agreement creating the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation Trust.

George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as assistant superintendent of schools in Maryland and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

Dr. Reavis' dream for the Educational Foundation was to make it possible for seasoned educators to write and publish the wisdom they had acquired over a lifetime of professional activity. He wanted educators and the general public to "better understand (1) the nature of the educative process and (2) the relation of education to human welfare."

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